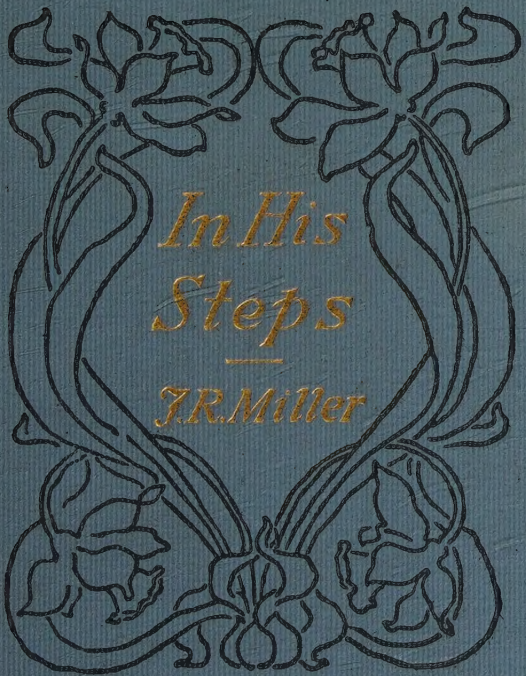

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IN HIS STEPS

For Those Beginning the Christian Life

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "WEEK-DAY RELIGION," "HOME-MAKING," "SILENT TIMES," ETC.

"Wherever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth there have I coveted to set my foot too."—MR. STANDFAST.

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1917

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FIFTY-FIRST THOUSAND

PREFACE TO NEW EDITION.

THE object of this little book is to help those who are beginning the Christian life. It contains merely a few suggestions and counsels by an older brother who has gone a little farther on the way, who has experienced some of the difficulties and dangers and learned a little of the help Christ is ready to give to those who will accept it.

This book has been prepared specially to meet the desire of pastors and sessions who wish to give to those whom they receive into the Church a suitable manual of instruction and help. Thousands of copies of the former edition have been given in this way. The book may be found suitable also for teachers to put into the hands of young people in their classes who wish to begin the Christian life.

This new edition contains much new matter, and the whole book has been carefully revised.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA.

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IN HIS STEPS.

CHAPTER I.

Uniting with the Church.

TO unite with the church is to take one's place among the followers of the Master. It is a public act. It is a confession of Christ before men. It is not a profession of superior saintliness; on the other hand, it is a distinct avowal of personal sinfulness and unworthiness. Those who seek admission into the church come as sinners, needing and accepting the mercy of God and depending upon the atonement of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

They come confessing Christ. They have heard his call, "Follow me," and have responded. Uniting with the church is taking a place among the friends of Christ; it is coming out from the world to be on Christ's side. There are but two parties among men. "He that is not with me is against me," said Jesus. The church consists of those who

are with Christ. This suggests one of the reasons why those who love Christ should take their place in the church. By so doing they declare to all the world where they stand and cast all the influence of their life and example on Christ's side.

Secret discipleship fails at this point. However much we may love Christ, however intimate our fellowship with him may be, however sincere our friendship for him, he misses in us the outspoken loyalty of a true confession which proclaims his name in its every breath. Secret discipleship hides its light and fails to honor Christ before men.

Uniting with the church is a declaration that one has joined the company of Christ's disciples. Disciples are learners. Young Christians have entered the school of Christ —have only entered it. They do not profess to have attained perfection; they profess only to have begun the Christian life.

Jesus took his first disciples into his school and for three years taught and trained them. He made known to them the great truths of Christianity which he had come to reveal—truths about God, about his kingdom on the earth, about duty. Then he taught them how to live.

In like manner the disciples of Christ who enter his church now become his scholars. They may be very ignorant, but this is no

reason why they should not be admitted to the school of the great Teacher. They should not wait to increase their knowledge before they become his disciples. The very purpose of a school is to take those who are ignorant and teach them.

But one condition of admittance as a scholar is, a desire to learn and a readiness to be taught. Of the first Christians, after the day of Pentecost, it is given as one of the marks of new life in them, that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching. They were eager to learn all they could hear about Jesus, and therefore they lost no opportunity of listening to the teaching of the apostles, who had been with Jesus for three years. Young Christians should always be eager to learn. This is one of the objects of church membership.

In different ways is this instruction given. A Christian home should be a school of Christ. The Christian mother is Christ's first apostle to her children who should learn from her lips the great lessons of life. Home teachings come first when the mind is open and the heart is tender and sensitive to impressions. The Sabbath-school is designed to do an important work in teaching the young the truths of Christianity. The pastor is a teacher. He has been trained to be an instructor of others in knowledge of God

and in the way of life. He expounds the vital truths of the Scriptures and also interprets them for daily life. The private reading of the Bible is another way of learning the things we need to know to make us wise unto salvation.

But knowledge is not all. Even Bible knowledge is not all, does not alone make one a good Christian. One might know all the great facts and doctrines of the word of God, might be a profound Bible scholar and a wise theologian, and yet not be an advanced or even a growing Christian. We are to learn to live Christ as well as to know the truths about Christ. Jesus in his teachings makes a great deal of obedience. We are his friends if we do whatsoever he commands us. We are to learn to be patient, meek, gentle, long-suffering, compassionate. We are to learn to be humble, kindly-affectioned, unselfish, truthful, sincere.

Young Christians enter Christ's school to be trained in all the qualities which make up the true Christian life. Jesus is not only the teacher,—his life is the text-book which we are to study. Part of his mission to this world was to show us in himself what a true and complete human life is. He was sinless, and he realized the full beauty of obedience to the divine will. We are to look to his life to learn just how to live, the kind of charac-

ter we are to seek to have, the meaning of the lessons which his words set for us. We are in the school of Christ to be trained in all Christian life and duty.

The lessons the Bible sets for us we are to learn to live out in common life. Every word of Christ sets a copy for us, as it were, and we are to learn to write it in fair and beautiful lines. For example, it is not enough to learn from the Beatitudes that certain qualities are praised by the great Teacher; we are to get the Beatitudes into our own life as quickly and as perfectly as we can. So of all the teachings of Christ—they are not for knowing merely, as one learns the fine sayings of favorite literary writers; they are for living. They are to become lamps to our feet and lights to our path, and they are to be wrought into the web of our character. The object of the church in this training of disciples is well expressed in the words of St. Paul,—"for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

This thought of the church as the school of Christ and of young Christians as enter-

ing the school, is very suggestive. We are not to expect perfection, but we have a right to expect an increasing knowledge of spiritual things and also spiritual growth in all the qualities which belong to Christian character. We should become more patient, more loving, more unselfish, more helpful, more faithful in all duty, more like Christ.

Uniting with the church brings its duties. It allies us with Christ and makes us coworkers with him. We are not to think merely of what the church may do for us, but also of what we may do for the church. Church loyalty is a mark of true and wholesome Christian life. One need not be a narrow sectarian to be a good church member; but one will always be the better Christian for being entirely devoted to his own church and enthusiastic in all its life and work. Anything that weakens a man's loyalty to his own particular church hurts his spiritual life and lessens his usefulness as a Christian.

In many ways church members may serve their church. They should be interested in all its work of saving souls and promoting the cause of Christ. They should regularly attend its services. They should contribute for its support. They should study its interests and seek in every way to extend its influence. They should keep the church in

their prayers, daily making supplication for it. They should bring to it always the best they have to bring, not of gifts and service only, but also of love and personal helpfulness.

It is a high privilege to be a church member, and one who has such honor should seek to be worthy of it, as the church is the body of Christ in this world.

CHAPTER II.

Beginning Well.

A GOOD beginning is half. Many people spend the latter part of their years in correcting the errors of the earlier part, and by the time they are ready to live the end has come. A good beginning at once turns all the energies into the right channels. No golden years need then be wasted in unlearning false lessons, in revising unwise or impracticable plans or in retracing one's steps.

Many a career of brilliant possibilities is marred by a wrong beginning. There are mistakes of early life which men never get over. A bad foundation has caused the wreck of many a noble building. Inadequate preparation for a business or a calling leads, at the best, to impaired success, and most frequently results, in the end, in utter failure.

These principles apply in Christian life. It is of the utmost importance that we start well. Many Christians walk in doubt and shadow all their days, never entering into rich joy and peace, because at the beginning

they failed to realize the blessedness of the privileges to which, as children of God, they are entitled. Many others never attain anything noble and beautiful in Christian life and character because at the beginning they did not wholly disentangle themselves from their old life and fully consecrate themselves to Christ.

A good beginning, therefore, involves two things—clearness and definiteness of aim, with intelligent views of the nature and meaning of the Christian life; and completeness of consecration.

Many men fail in life because they have no settled purpose, no well-defined plan. They have no goal set before them which with all their energies they strive to reach. There is in their mind no clear and distinct idea toward which they struggle. They merely drift on the current, and are borne by it whithersoever it flows. They are not masters in life, but poor slaves. They conquer nothing, but are the mere creatures of circumstance. Such lives, however, are unworthy of intelligent beings endowed with immortal powers, and they never reach any high degree of nobleness or success.

No sculptor touches the marble until he has in his mind a definite conception of his work as it will appear when it has been finished. He sees a vision before him of a

very lovely form, and then sets to work to fashion the vision in the stone. No builder begins to erect a house until a complete plan embracing every detail has been adopted. Before he strikes a stroke he knows precisely what the finished structure will be. No one would cut into a web of rich and costly cloth until he had before him the pattern of the garment he would make. In all work on material things men have definite aims before they begin their work, and know precisely what they intend to produce.

But in life itself and in living, in character-building, in destiny-shaping, many fail to exercise such wisdom. Multitudes never give one earnest thought to such questions as these: "What is my life? For what purpose is it intrusted to me? What ought I to do with it? What should be the great aim of my existence? What should I strive to be and to do?" Thousands live aimlessly, having no true sense of the responsibility of living, never forming an earnest, resolute purpose to rise to any noble height or to achieve any worthy thing. An immortal life should have its aim ever shining before it bright and clear as a star in the heavens. To grow up as a plant—without thought or purpose—is well enough for a plant, and God clothes it and shapes it into marvelous beauty; but men with undying souls and measureless

possibilities should have a purpose worthy of their immortality, and should strive with heroic energy to attain it.

In entering the Christian life there should be a clear aim. We should know definitely what this new life is which we have now to live. With but vague ideas of the meaning of a Christian life—its ideal, its requirements, its privileges, the duties which belong to it—no one can begin well. All is vague and misty, and while it is so we cannot put any purpose or energy into our life. We need to understand the new relations into which we come as children of God, in order that we may realize the privileges of our position. We need to have a clear conception of the final aim of all Christian attainment and aspiration, in order that we may strive toward it. We need to know what is required of a Christian toward his God and toward his fellow men, in order that we may faithfully and intelligently perform all our duties. We need to know the conditions of Christian life—its needs, its dangers—in order that we may avail ourselves of the necessary helps provided for us. Thus a clear and intelligent aim is essential in beginning well as a Christian.

The other essential thing in beginning well is the devotion and consecration of ourselves to the new life we have chosen. A good

ideal is not enough. One may aim an arrow with perfect accuracy, but the bow must also be drawn and the cord let fly if the arrow is to reach the mark. A vision in the brain is not enough for the sculptor: he must hew and chisel the marble into the form of his vision. The architect's plan is only a picture, and there must be toil and cost until the building stands complete in its noble beauty.

A good aim is not all of a Christian life. It is nothing more than an empty dream unless it be wrought out in Godlike character and Christlike ministry. Every earnest Christian looks much at the glorious Master, and, as he looks, visions of wondrous beauty fill his soul—glimpses of the loveliness of Christ; and he must then seek with patient yet intense purpose to reproduce these heavenly visions in his own life.

Many people have sublimest aspirations and wishes—and even form their aspirations and wishes into intentions and resolves—who yet never take a step toward realizing them. Mere knowing what it is to be a Christian makes no one a Christian; many perish with the glorious ideal shining full and clear before their eyes. Merely seeing the beauty of Christ, as it is held before us for our copying, will never fashion us into that beauty. Our knowledge must be wrought into life.

Beginning Well.

The image our souls see must be fashioned into character. Our good intentions must take form in daily deeds. Knowing God's will, we must do it with willing heart and diligent hand.

"Make my mortal dreams come true
With the work I fain would do;
Clothe with life the weak intent:
Let me be the thing I meant;
Let me find in thy employ
Peace that dearer is than joy;
Out of self to love be led,
And to heaven acclimated,
Until all things sweet and good
Seem my natural habitude."

CHAPTER III.

The Christian Life: The Ideal.

WHAT is it to be a Christian? What is that change which, wrought in a natural man, makes him a Christian man? What are a Christian's new relations to God and to his fellow men? What is Christian character? How should a Christian live? What is the pattern on which his life should be fashioned? If we would make our Christian life what it ought to be, we must find plain, clear answers to these questions.

A Christian is one who believes on Christ. He has intrusted his whole life, with its sin, its guilt, its ruin, its need its security for eternity, its redemption, cleansing and transformation, to the hands of the mighty Saviour, the strong Son of God. A Christian is therefore a saved one, a redeemed one—saved, redeemed, by Christ. He is no longer guilty and condemned: he is acquitted, justified, restored to such relations before God that he is as if he had never sinned, so fully are his sins put away. He is God's lost and wander-

ing child brought home, received, reconciled, restored to all a child's privileges.

But this is not all; it is not merely a change of relations. Those who believe on Christ are born again, the Scriptures say—born from above, born of God; that is, there is a new, a divine, life in the regenerated soul. Christ speaks of it as a well of water in the believer springing up into everlasting life. The result is shown in new affections, new desires, new hopes, new aims. Forgiveness of sins is not enough. A man's lies and dishonesties may be forgiven; but, if that is all, he is still a liar and dishonest. God's forgiveness regenerates. A Christian life is the setting up of the kingdom of God in a human heart.

A child was troubled at the thought that heaven was so far away, and was perplexed to know how he could ever get up to that bright home. His mother explained to him that heaven must first come down to him—must first enter his heart. A Christian is one into whose heart the spirit of heaven has entered. The new life is like that they live in heaven. We are taught to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The one place in all the earth in which it most concerns each Christian to see that God's will is done as it is in heaven is in his own individual heart.

If we are truly born again, the life of

heaven has really begun within us. It may be very feeble in its beginning, like one little seed only, planted in a garden; but the one seed is from heaven, and the new life in us has truly begun. "That which is born of the Spirit," said the Master, "is spirit." It is the life of the Spirit in a human soul. Paul put this truth in a very striking way when he said, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Our Lord said a Christian is "a branch" of the true Vine. This suggests what Christian life and character should be before the world. Every true Christian is a new incarnation. Christ showed the world in his own person the life of the invisible God. No human eye ever saw God in his glory; no one could ever have seen him had not Christ come down and in a plain, simple, and real, human life which men could see and understand, lived out the divine life which in its glory men could neither see nor understand. He interpreted the invisible things of God in act and phrase which the common people could read. He said, when he was asked about God, "Look at me and see God. I and my Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

In like manner, in his own small measure, every one truly a Christian is an incarnation of God, and should be able in humility to say, "Look at me, and you will see a dim

but faithful representation of God." This puts a very solemn responsibility on every Christian. He represents God in this world, and is to live in such a way that from his life men shall learn the truth about God. If Christ lives in us, men must see Christ in our faces and hear him in our words and learn of him in our acts.

The ideal of Christian life is therefore the likeness of Christ. That is the pattern shown in the mount after which we are to strive to fashion our life.

As we study Christ in the Gospels there rises up before us the vision of his matchless beauty. We go over the chapters, and we find one fragment of his loveliness here and another there; and as we read the story through to the end beauty after beauty appears, until at length we see a full vision of the Christ which, though imperfect by reason of the imperfectness of our nature, yet truly represents to us the image of our blessed Redeemer. This is the pattern we are to follow in fashioning our lives. This is the vision we are to seek to carve into reality in our own character. All our acts we are to bring to the example of Christ, testing each one by that infallible standard.

The Gospels should be studied by the young Christian as a builder studies the architect's drawings, that every minutest detail may be

exactly reproduced so far as in a faulty and sinful human life the character and conduct of the faultless and sinless Jesus can be reproduced. The perfect pattern is ever to be held before us for imitation, and as we look at it glowing in all its marvelous beauty, yet far above us and beyond our present reach, we are to comfort ourselves and stir our hearts to the noblest efforts and highest attainments by the thought, "That is what some time I am going to be." However slow may be our progress toward that perfect ideal; however sore the struggles with weakness and sin; however often we fail,—we are never to lose sight of the distant goal nor cease to strive and press toward the mark. Some day, if we are faithful to the end and faint not, we shall emerge out of all failure and struggle, and, seeing Jesus as he is, shall be fully transformed into his blessed image.

Such is the aim of the Christian life. "We shall be like him"—that is the final destiny of every redeemed life. This should be inspiration enough to arouse in the dullest soul every sluggish hope and every slumbering energy, and to impel to the highest effort and the most heroic struggle. This assurance should perpetually shine like a bright star beyond the fields of toil and battle, forbidding discouragement in any temporary failure or defeat and cheering all faintness and

weariness into buoyant strength and enthusiasm.

This goal of blessedness is not to be reached at one bound: it is the work of long and painful years, and the progress is slow and the transformation gradual and almost imperceptible.

"Heaven is not gained by a single bound,
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

It will help us, in striving after the perfected beauty, to remember that we can best attain it by carving each moment's line with care. God gives us life by days and hours, not by months and years. The way to have his purpose for us fulfilled in us is to fill each minute with simple faithfulness. Doing God's will for one moment not only lights the path for the next, but prepares us for its responsibility. Charles Kingsley said, "Do to-day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken or distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them."

Character is a mosaic in which each day has its little stone to set; we need but to look well to the days as they come, and to print on each its record of beauty, and the whole will be beautiful in the end. This living sim-

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ply by the day is one of the royal secrets of a beautiful life which every young Christian should learn.

A life thus lived, each day made beautiful with the beauty of holiness and of usefulness, will in the end give a record of duty well done, of work completed, of blessings left behind at each step, and a character transfigured by the indwelling divine Spirit and the outworking of love until it shines in the full likeness of Christ himself.

CHAPTER IV.

Living for God: Consecration.

IT is not enough to cut loose from the old life: the young Christian must enter the new life. Leaving the service of one master, he must enlist in that of another. Withdrawing his heart's affections from one class of objects, he must fix them upon another class. Ceasing to do evil, he must also learn to do well. No longer a servant of sin, he must become a servant of righteousness. Mere repentance is not enough; giving up one's wicked ways is but half of conversion: there must also be a devotement of the life to Christ. The heart cannot be left empty.

"When St. Boniface had hewn down the sacred oak worshiped by the savages in the tangled forests of Germany, he did not stop with destroying it, but when it was felled built out of its fallen and splintered fragments the chapel of St. Peter, and in the room of the worship of Thor the Thunderer left the worship of Christ the crucified. 'To replace is to conquer;' and the theology of

the forests fled back abashed before the theology of the cross."

When we break with the world, we must straightway bow before Christ; indeed, we can be freed from the dominion of the old master only by the coming into our hearts of the new. The only way we can turn from sin is by turning to Christ. He then becomes, first, Deliverer and Saviour; afterwards, King and Lord. As such he must be accepted, and the whole allegiance of the life should instantly be transferred to him.

This is conversion; it is going over to Christ fully, wholly, freely and for ever. It is not merely attaching ourselves to the church: it is attaching ourselves to Christ. It is not merely entering upon a good moral life—pure, honest, clean; not merely engaging in active Christian work: it is the acceptance of Christ, first as a personal Saviour, then as a personal Lord. It is coming to Christ himself, believing on him, following him, loving him, obeying him.

It is important that the young Christian shall understand this, and that his devotion to his Lord shall be real and complete. No man can serve two masters. It will not do to try a divided allegiance. True consecration carries all over to Christ.

For one thing, this means holiness: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a

price: therefore glorify God." Holiness means separation for God. The life which belongs to Christ must be kept from sin. The hands which are held up in prayer and that take the sacramental emblems must not touch any unclean thing. The lips which speak to God, sing his praise and pronounce his name must not be stained by any sinful or bitter words. The heart which is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit must not open to any thought or affection that would defile God's temple. The feet which Christ's pierced hands have washed must not walk in any of sin's unhallowed paths. A consecrated life must be holy.

Unholiness is very subtle. It creeps in when we are not aware. It begins in the heart. At first it is but a thought, a moment's imagination, a passing emotion, or a desire. Hence the heart should be kept with unremitting diligence. Only pure and good thoughts should be entertained. It is in the thoughts that all life begins. All acts are thoughts first. Our thoughts build up our character as the coral insects build up the great reefs. As a man thinketh in his heart so is he. If we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world as we pass through its foul streets, we must see to it that no unholy thing is for a moment tolerated in our heart. A crime stains one's name before

the world; a sinful thought or wish stains the soul in God's sight and grieves the divine Spirit within us.

But the keeping of the life unspotted is not the whole of living for God: there must be service also. When young Christians are received into the church they profess to dedicate themselves and all they have—time, talents, money, every power of body, soul, and spirit—to the service of Christ for ever. This means that they will no longer claim mastership over themselves; that henceforth they are Christ's servants; that they will live for Christ only all the days; that they will listen at each step for his command and promptly obey it; that they will devote all their possessions to him, using them for him and at his bidding; and that they will employ their talents and influence to advance his kingdom.

Daily duty in the common relations of life is as much part of a true consecration as are praying, reading the Bible, and attending church services. If the heart be given to Christ, the whole life is holy. We do not live two lives—one religious and one secular—after we become Christians. We are always to do God's will, and it is as much his will that we should be diligent in business as that we should be fervent in spirit.

Living for God: Consecration.

"The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask—
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

When young persons yet in school become Christians, they are not to drop their secular studies and read the Bible all the time: they are to go on with their lessons—only with new motives, for Christ now—faithfully using every moment, diligently striving to get the greatest possible benefit and improvement from their education to fit them for the life and work before them. When religion makes a pupil less diligent, less studious, less earnest, there is something wrong. When a young man in a trade or business gives himself to Christ, unless his occupation is sinful he is ordinarily called to continue in it, carrying his Christian principles into it and doing business now for Christ.

Secular work is not unholy. All duty is sacred in God's sight. The hands of Jesus swung the ax and pushed the plane, and he pleased the Father just as well then as when he was praying and reading the Scriptures. Paul's hand sewed upon tents, and he was just as near to God when thus at work as when he was preaching in the synagogue.

Of course the motive of life is changed when we truly belong to Christ. Self comes down from the throne and we do everything

for the Master: "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We train our powers to greater efficiency that we may be more useful in Christ's work. We live carefully that in the smallest things we may honor him. We seek increased influence that we may do more to bless the world and advance the glory of Christ's name. The world is reading our lives, and it reads no other Bible; we must make sure, therefore, that our daily actions spell out a true gospel, so that no one who sees us may ever get from us a wrong thought of Christ or a wrong sense of his religion.

We do not understand one half the blessing to others and the influence for religion there is in simply being good. We struggle to be active and to do many things. We run everywhere to work for Christ. We think that unless we are always doing something, or talking to somebody, or holding a meeting somewhere, or visiting the poor or the sick, we are not useful. We make a mistake. There is no other such power for real usefulness and helpfulness, no other such glorifying of God, as in simple goodness. Holy life itself is highest service.

Hence there should be in every young Christian the most conscientious watchfulness over the early growths of spirituality in his own heart. These growths are tender and

easily destroyed, like the young plants which the gardener keeps in his conservatory through the winter and cool spring days.

The whole matter of heart-culture requires the utmost diligence. All life, business and social as well as religious, must be made to contribute to it. We should form our friendships and choose our amusements with reference to their effect on our heart-life. Some one has given this true test, whose application should be wide as life itself: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your view of God or takes off the relish of spiritual things —in short, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind—that is *sin to you*, however innocent it may be in itself."

A life so regulated, so watched, so ruled by conscience and by the word and Spirit of God, will grow into a living power of real holiness the value of whose ministry will be incalculable in its silent pervasive influence.

"Birds, by being glad, their Maker bless;
By simply shining, sun and star;
And we, whose law is love, serve less
By what we do than what we are."

There is still another part of all true consecration: besides living a pure and good life, and besides doing all our daily work for Christ, we should also embrace every oppor-

tunity of doing good to others in Christ's name and for his sake. There are needy and suffering ones all about us, and we are to do Christ's errands to these, performing for them the ministries of kindness and mercy which he would render if he were here in person. There are weak and fainting ones about us who find life hard and who need sympathy and help. To all these we have errands of love; we should share their burdens and put strong, sustaining arms about them in their weakness.

A life for Christ must always be a life of love, of usefulness and of helpfulness. No true Christian lives for himself. We have our model in him who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." We need not wait for great opportunities—these come but rarely; the common days are full of opportunities for little kindnesses, thoughtfulnesses, and unselfishnesses, and in order to write bright records for ourselves we have only to seize these and stretch out our hands to render the ministries to which God thus invites and calls us. Doing the thing that Christ himself would do if he were precisely in our place—that is the rule for Christian living.

Thus consecration becomes very real. It is living for God, day by day, hour by hour. It is nothing strained or unnatural;

it does not wrench us out of our place nor disturb our relationships unless they are sinful; it is the simple living out in true devotion to Christ, in unquestioning obedience and in quiet faithfulness, the life he gives, in whatever sphere our lot may be cast.

CHAPTER V.

Meeting Temptation: Conflict.

THE experience of temptation is universal. Every life must grow up amid unfriendly and opposing influences—some of them subtle and insidious, like miasma in the air; some of them fierce and wild, like the blast of storm or the rush of battle. Much is said in sermons about the solemn nature of death; yet really it is not half so perilous a thing to die as it is to live. No child of God was ever lost, or even harmed, in the experience of dying.

"The grave itself is but a covered bridge
Leading from light to light through a brief darkness."

But life is full of peril. To live truly we must battle day by day. Satan is no mediæval myth, but an actual foe, powerful, cunning, treacherous, terrible. Danger lurks in every shadow.

The question in life is not how to escape temptation, but how to pass through it so as

not to be harmed by it. Christ's way of helping us is not by keeping us out of the conflicts. This would leave us forever weak, untried, undisciplined. The price of spiritual attainment and culture is struggle. Jesus himself was made perfect through suffering.

All the best things in life—the only things worth obtaining—lie beyond fields of battle, and we can get them only by overcoming. It would be no kindness to us were God to withdraw us into some sheltered spot whenever there is danger, or if he were to fight our battles for us, thus freeing us from all necessity to struggle.

"He who hath never a conflict hath never a victor's palm,
And only the toilers know the sweetness of rest and calm."

We must meet temptation, and we must fight. Not to fight is to lose all. Nor is there really any need for yielding. The weakest child may move unharmed through the sorest strifes. It is possible to meet the strongest temptations and not be hurt by them. It has been done. Men have met the fiercest enemies, the most unrelenting oppositions, passing through the hottest flames, and have come out, like the Hebrew children from the king's furnace, without even the smell of fire on their garments.

Whatever may be said of the weakness of human nature unhelped and unsustained, there still is no need for any trembling soul to faint or to fail in the strife.

There is a divine Helper who himself went into the thickest of the struggle and passed through it unharmed. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"—that is, he met all life victoriously; and because he was thus victorious he is able, not only to understand human struggles and to sympathize with every one who is tempted, but also to give "grace to help in time of need." We have the assurance that the faithful God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation make the way of escape, that we may be able to endure it.

There is, therefore, a way of so living in this world as not to suffer harm in even the fiercest temptations—to pass through them and not be touched by them. There is even a way of so meeting temptations as to get benefit and blessing from them. An apostle said, "Count it all joy when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience;" "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him."

Rightly meeting and victoriously resisting puts new fiber into the soul. The Indians say that when a warrior kills a foe the spirit of the vanquished enemy enters the victor's heart and adds to his own strength. This is true in spiritual warfare. We grow stronger through our struggles and victories. Each lust conquered, each evil subdued, adds to the strength of our soul.

The question, then, is how to meet temptation so as to overcome it, and thus win the blessing there is in it. We must remember, first of all, that we are not able in ourselves successfully to fight our battles. If we think we are, and go forth in our own name and strength, we shall fail. Life is too large, and its struggles and conflicts are too sore, for the strongest human power unaided.

We must settle it once for all that we can conquer only in the name and by the help of the strong Son of God. We may come off the field more than conquerors, but only through him that loved us. We can pass safely through all the fierce dangers of this world and be kept unspotted amid its sin and foulness, but only if we have with us him who is able to guard us from stumbling and set us before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy. Self-confidence in temptation is fatal folly.

Then we must be sure that the temptation

we are meeting really lies in the path of our duty—that God calls us to meet it. Some temptations must be overcome by avoidance, by not meeting them. We pray each morning, "Lead us not into temptation;" we must, then, be sure that we are following our Father's leading when we enter any way of temptation. Only when the temptation comes in the path over which the divine Guide takes us, have we the assurance of protection in it.

Lord Macaulay tells us that at the siege of Naumur, while the conflict was raging, William, prince of Orange, who was giving his orders under a shower of bullets, saw with surprise and anger among his staff officers Michael Godfrey, the deputy governor of the Bank of England. He had come to the king's headquarters on business, and was curious to see real war.

"Mr. Godfrey," said King William, "you ought not to run these hazards. You are not a soldier; you can be of no use to us here."

"Sir," answered Godfrey, "I run no more risk than Your Majesty."

"Not so," said William. "I am where it is my duty to be, and I may without presumption commit my life to God's keeping; but you—"

Before the sentence was finished a cannon-ball laid Godfrey dead at the king's feet.

The king's words were true, and the truth

is just as applicable to temptations and spiritual dangers as to the perils of war. When duty calls us into any place, we are safe: God will protect us; but otherwise we venture without any promise of shelter. We must face danger only when God and duty unmistakably lead.

Then, when we find ourselves in the presence of temptation, we must not forget that we have something to do ourselves in getting the victory. Men and devils may tempt us, but men and devils cannot force us to yield. We are sovereigns in our choices while the right and the wrong stand before us. Other wills than ours may seek to influence us—may plead, entreat, persuade—but they cannot compel.

We cannot avoid being tempted, but we ought to avoid yielding to temptation. Luther used to say, "We cannot keep the birds from flying round our heads, but we can prevent them building their nests in our hair." We cannot keep temptations away from our ears nor prevent them whispering their seductive words close by us, but we can hinder them making their nests in our hearts.

We are not to be passive in this matter. We must not expect God to fasten the door and hold his hand upon the lock. The shutting and opening of the door is our part of the responsibility. Even God himself will

never come into our heart unless we voluntarily open it to him. Christ stands without and knocks, waiting with all his wealth of love and all his power to bless until we bid him welcome. We with our frail weakness can keep even Omnipotence outside. So, as divine grace cannot enter to do us good unless we open, neither can satanic evil enter to work ruin in our souls without our consent. We are doorkeeper of our own heart. Thus the final responsibility is with ourselves. Hence our duty in temptation is unwavering resistance—an unreversible "No!" to every solicitation to sin. If we settle this point, we have learned one of the greatest lessons in spiritual warfare—"having done all, to stand."

Besides this, nothing more is needed but faith and prayer. When the temptation comes in the path of duty, and when we resist it with unflinching determination, we may with simple confidence commit the keeping of our life to God. No evil can ever harm us if we cleave unfalteringly to Christ: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Still better: "The Lord is thy keeper."

There come times in every life when all we can do is to shut our eyes and let God lead us. Indeed, in all hours of darkness and danger, this is our privilege and our duty; and if we thus commit our way to God, he

will bring us safely through the last peril and the last struggle into the light and joy of victory on the heavenly plains.

Then it will be seen that it has been no misfortune that we have had to fight sore battles on the earth. Old war-veterans are not ashamed of their scars—they are marks of honor; they tell of wounds received in battling for their country. In heaven the soldier of Christ will not be ashamed of the scars he has gotten in his warfare for his Lord on the earth; his crown will be all the brighter for them. They will shine as the King's medals, decorations of honor—"the marks of the Lord Jesus."

When an army marches home from a victorious field, it is not the bright, clean, untorn flag that is most wildly cheered, but the flag that is pierced, riddled and torn by the shot and shell of many a battle. So in the home-coming in glory it will not be the man who bears fewest marks of suffering and struggle and fewest scars of wounds received in Christ's service who will be welcomed with the greatest joy, but the man who bears the marks of the sorest conflicts and the greatest sufferings for the honor of his Lord and for his kingdom.

CHAPTER VI.

Working for Christ: Service.

EVERY truly consecrated life has been made over to Christ with all its powers. Faith implies full surrender: "Ye are not your own;" "Ye are Christ's." Christ owns us first by right of creation, then by right of purchase; and we acknowledge his ownership and all that it includes when we accept him as our Saviour and Lord. The first question, therefore, of the new-believing heart is, "What shall I do, Lord?" We want to begin to work for our new Master.

"Be thy best thoughts to work divine addressed;
Do something—do it soon—with all thy might:
An angel's wings would droop if long at rest,
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest."

We belong to Christ; we are his slaves—that is the word St. Paul used so much, and with such a thrill of joy as he thought of the honor it denoted. He was Christ's slave. "Whose I am, and whom I serve," was his working creed. "Thy will, not mine," is henceforth

the only true law of life for us. We are to wait at each step for Christ's bidding. Our very thoughts must be brought into captivity to him.

This ownership covers and embraces all life. A heart of love for Christ makes the sweeping of a room, the ploughing of a field, the sawing of a board, the making of a garment, the selling of a piece of goods, the minding of a baby, all actions as fine as the ministry of angels.

One way of working for Christ, therefore, is to be diligent in the doing of life's common daily tasks. The true giving of ourselves to God exalts all of life into divine honor and sacredness. Nothing is trivial or indifferent which it is our duty to do. We are never to neglect any work, however secular it may seem, in order to do something else which appears to be more religious. There are some people who would be better Christians if they paid more heed to their own daily business, attended fewer meetings and did less religious gossiping. Ruskin says, "Neither days nor lives can be made holy by doing nothing in them. The best prayer at the beginning of a day is that we may not lose its moments; and the best grace before meat, the consciousness that we have justly earned our dinner."

We need a religion which puts itself into

everything we do. The old shoemaker was right when he said that when he stands before the great white throne God will ask, "What kind of shoes did you make down on the earth?" We must do all our work for the judgement day, our common everyday tasks as well as our religious duties. The carpenter must get his religion into the houses he builds, the plumber into his plumbing, the tailor into his seams, the merchant into his sales. All our work we must do for God's eye.

But, besides this living of the whole life for Christ, there is specific work for him in which every Christian has a part to perform. Every one who is saved should do something toward saving others. The first thought of a truly saved person is of some friend or friends who are still in peril; and the first impulse of a renewed heart is to try to bring these lost ones to the Saviour. The cause of Christ in this world needs assistance in many ways, and it is the will of the Master that this cause should be advanced, not by the ministry of angels, not by Christ himself immediately and directly, but by his people—those whom he has redeemed and saved. The story of salvation must be told by lips that have first uttered the cry for mercy. The lost must be won by the love of hearts that have first been broken in penitence. The divine blessing of

salvation must be carried in earthen vessels to the perishing.

Every Christian has something to do for Christ in this world. The fullest hands must make room for some little part of the Master's work. Even the child that loves Christ may at least carry a cup of the water of life to some thirsty soul.

Every Christian should be deeply imbued with the missionary spirit. A portion of the responsibility for carrying the news of salvation to every creature rests on each follower of Christ. In these days of missionary activity there is no one who cannot do something to help send the gospel to heathen lands. Every young Christian should consider himself, from the moment of his consecration to Christ, a debtor to all men, near and far, who are not yet saved, and in prayer and work and gift he should seek to pay that debt to the last atom of his ability.

In nearly every church there are missionary organizations for the cultivation of the missionary spirit, the diffusing of information and the gathering of money for the work of missions. Every young Christian should be identified with one of these organizations, thus imbibing the missionary spirit and preparing for active interest and service in the cause.

There is also very much sorrow and suffer-

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ing in this world, and every Christian should do all in his power to comfort the sorrow and alleviate the suffering. Here, as in all things, Jesus himself is our example and his life is our pattern. We represent him in this world. He has gone away to heaven, but he has left his people here to carry on his work.

Here is a wide field for Christlike and most helpful ministry. What we need for it is a spirit of sympathy and kindness that shall never fail. We may not be able to do much to relieve those who are troubled: we certainly cannot work miracles as Christ did; but we may have a heart of love which shall manifest itself toward every one in a spirit of patient gentleness and kindly thoughtfulness.

Sincere sympathy is oftentimes better than money. People in distress generally need a friend more than they need gift or miracle. God sends to earth no angels whose ministry leaves more benedictions of joy, of help, of inspiration, of uplifting, of restoring, than are left by the ministry of the angel of true human sympathy.

For this service we need only to have in us the true spirit of Christ, a spirit of unselfish love, and then blessing will flow from our life even without effort or purpose, unconsciously, as fragrance pours from a flower, as light streams from a lamp.

"As some rare perfume in a vase of clay
Pervades it with a fragrance not its own,
So, when Thou dwellest in a mortal soul,
All heaven's own sweetness seems around it thrown."

Christ did other kinds of work, but it was the same spirit that wrought in all his ministry. He taught the people; he scattered the words of truth; he lifted up his voice against wrong and sin; he sought the lost and led them back to the Father; he went to the cross in the room of sinners. In all forms of personal ministry we are to strive to follow in his steps. The golden seeds of heavenly truth which his lips dropped we are to seek to scatter everywhere in life's desert-fields.

The very best thing we can do for people in this world of sin and sorrow is to get the words of Christ into their hearts. It is like scattering flower seeds on the black lava beds about the fiery mountain's base—in the crevices the seeds will root and grow, and sweet flowers will bloom by and by. Christ's words are living seeds from which spring up heavenly plants to beautify and bless bleak and dreary lives over which sin's fires have rolled. The tiniest hand and the weakest can scatter these seeds in some bare spot where they will grow.

It is the little things that all of us can do

in Christ's name which in the end leave the largest aggregate of blessing in the world. We need not wait to do great and conspicuous things. One Amazon is enough for a continent, but there is room for a million little rivulets and purling brooks. A life that every day gives its blessing to another and adds to the happiness of some fellow being by only a word of kindness, a thoughtful act, a cheering look, or a hearty hand-grasp, does more for the world than he who but once in a lifetime does some great thing which fills a land with his praise. Nothing that is done for Christ is lost. The smallest acts, the quietest words, the gentlest inspirations that touch human souls, leave their impress for eternity.

Then, while we are giving out blessings to help and to enrich other lives, we are receiving also into our own heart. The words of the Master are literally true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." He did not say it is more pleasant, more agreeable, but more blessed. The song we sing to cheer a weary spirit echoes back new cheer into our own soul. The sacrifice we make to help one in distress leaves us not poorer, but richer. Love's stores are not wasted by giving—the more we give, the more we have. The way to grow rich in the treasures of kindness and affection is to show kindness

and affection to all who need. If we find our spiritual life languishing, its resources growing less, the true way to refresh it is not by closer economy in giving out to others, but by greater generosity.

"For the heart grows rich in giving:
All its wealth is living grain;
Seeds which mildew in the garner,
Scattered, fill with gold the plain.

* * * * *

"Is the heart a living power?
Self-entwined, its strength sinks low,
It can only live in loving;
And by serving love will grow."

In every living church there are various organized forms of Christian activity; in some one or more of these every member should be engaged. Let the young Christian at once choose the particular class of work in which he decides that it is best for him to engage, and promptly identify himself with the organization, society or band which has in view the special work he has selected. There should not be one idle Christian in any church. One of the most withering curses uttered in the Scriptures is against uselessness —against those who come not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Thus Christian work is not only a duty, but a means of grace. It is not the rest of inaction to which Christ calls us, but the rest

of loving service. Every power of our being we should give to him to be used. Every gift we possess should be employed in doing good. That day is a lost day in which we do nothing to bless some other life in the name of Christ.

"Work for some good, be it ever so slowly;
Cherish some flower, be it ever so lowly:
Labor! all labor is noble and holy;
Let thy good deeds be a prayer to thy God."

CHAPTER VII.

Helps: Personal Prayer.

WE all need helps in our Christian life. Of course, all the help we require we can find in God. His is the almighty arm on which we should ever lean in our weakness; his is the infinite life from whose fullness we should ever draw for the refilling of our own exhausted life-pitchers; his is the light that should ever shine upon our darkness for cheer, for comfort, for guidance, for joy. God is all we need.

But we cannot see God with these mortal eyes; we cannot feel his bosom when we need to lean upon it; we cannot hear his voice when we listen for the word he may have to speak; we cannot carry our empty pitchers up to heaven, where God dwells, to have them refilled. We are like vines torn off the trellis and trailing on the ground amid the dust and the weeds, and we cannot lift ourselves up to twine about the unseen supports which God's grace provides. We need something to help our dull senses—

something we can see or hear or touch; something to interpret to our souls and bring near to them the spiritual things of divine love; something to which the tendrils of our life can cling, and which will lift them up and fasten them on the invisible realities of the spiritual world. And in loving mercy, in condescension to our weakness and spiritual dullness, God has provided for us such helps as we need. He brings us his blessings in ways that are adapted to our earthly state and capacity. He puts the rich supplies of his heavenly grace in cups from which we can drink, and sets them low down where we can reach them.

One of the helps which God has provided is *prayer*. Without prayer no Christian life can exist. There are other spiritual helps from the want of which we may suffer, but without which we may still live near to God; but to give up prayer is to die.

Why should we pray? Because God is our Father and we are his children. It would be a most undutiful, unfilial, ungrateful child who should live in a good and beautiful home, enjoying its comforts, blessed by its love, and who should never have anything to say to the father whose heart and hand make the home, and who provides its comforts and pleasures.

We should pray, also, because we need

things which we can get only by prayer. Some things we can pick up with our hands in this good world of our Father's, or buy with our money, or receive through our friends; but there are things which we can get only directly from God himself, and only by asking him for them. He alone can forgive our sins; and unless we are forgiven, life is not worth living. He alone can give us a new heart; and unless we have a new heart, we can never enter heaven. He alone can give us grace to live a good and holy life and keep us from sinking back into sin. He alone can help us to fight life's battles and come out victorious at the end. He alone can lead us through death's valley to glory. Indeed, we can do nothing without God. The leaf quivering on the bough is not more dependent upon the tree for its greenness and life than are we dependent upon God for our very existence and for all blessings. We must pray or perish.

But *may* we pray? We look up, and we see no face in the heavens, no eye gazing down—nothing but sky and clouds or stars. We speak and then listen, but no answer comes to us: all is silence about us. Is there really any one to hear? Or if there is, *will* he hear?

There are millions of people on the earth, and there are millions of other worlds besides

this. Astronomers tell us that our globe, if it were suddenly destroyed, would not be more missed in God's vast universe than one leaf which you might pluck off a wayside bush would be missed from all the leaves on all the trees and forests of the earth. It may be that, like our planet, these other countless worlds have their millions of inhabitants. Will God hear the cry of one person among so many? Does he take notice of individuals? Does he have particular thought and care for each one?

The Bible plainly answers these questions. It tells us that God is our Father; that he loves us, not merely as a race, but as individuals—loves us each one with a peculiar personal affection, as a human father loves each one of his children though he have many; that he thinks of us, giving to the smallest, humblest of us particular thought and care, watching over us, listening for our cry, ready always at any moment to give the help we need and seek.

A little child fancied that when she began to pray, God asked all the angels to stop singing and playing on their harps while he listened to her prayer until she said "Amen!" She was not far wrong in her fancy. God does not need to hush the angels' songs to hear a child's prayer; but he hears it, nevertheless, amid all the noises of this great

universe, just as truly and clearly as if every other voice were hushed.

One of the psalms represents God as inclining his ear to the suppliant on the earth to hear his cry, as a man bends down so as to bring his ear close to one who speaks, that he may catch every word. In another psalm are these remarkable words: "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner." The Bible is full of just such human representations of God's interest in his children on the earth, and of his loving attention when they cry to him. We may pray, therefore: there is One to hear us.

How shall we pray so as to be heard and to receive help? For one thing, there must be real desire in our hearts. Forms of words do not make prayer: we must want something, and must realize our dependence upon God for it. Then we must come to him as his children. It was Christ himself who taught us to pray to "Our Father which art in heaven." If we have the true child-spirit which the using of this invocation implies, we shall make our requests with confidence, believing that our Father loves us and will deny us nothing that is for our good.

Of course, we must remember that God knows better than we do what is best for us,

and we must be willing, even when our desires are strongest and most impetuous, to say, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." We must let our Father decide whether the thing we ask is the thing we need. The thing we want might be poison to our life; if so, God will not give it to us, but, instead, will give us grace to do without it, which is an answer to our desire, and a far better answer than the thing we sought.

Prayer should also be earnest. Two of our Lord's parables were spoken to impress this duty. If an unjust judge could be so moved by importunity, how much more will the loving heart of the heavenly Father yield to repeated supplication! The man at whose door the friend knocked at midnight gave the loaves, not because it was his friend who asked them, but because the friend would not go away without them. God is not moved by such low motives, but the parable is meant to show the power of persevering importunity in prayer. God wants to see his children in earnest; he loves to hear from suppliants the burning words which tell of intense desire. One fervent, impassioned "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" has more power with God than whole years of cold, heartless, formal prayer.

Of course, importunity must not become rebelliousness: in the greatest intensity of

our praying we must ever be ready to acquiesce in God's will. Importunity has its limits. It may at length become evident that God does not want to give us what we desire; then we should cease to plead, with submissive faith accepting our Father's refusal. Thus our Lord himself in the garden was importunate, but from first to last he deferred all to his Father's will; and after having prayed three times he ceased to plead, taking the cup held out to him. Paul was importunate in pleading for the removal of the thorn which so troubled him, but, like his Master, he also was acquiescent; and after pleading three times he too ceased to urge his plea.

There is little danger that we ever too earnestly or importunately press our desires for spiritual good, either for ourselves or for others. We know it is always God's will to give us more grace, to make us holier and purer, to bring out in us more clearly the features of the divine image, to give us more of his Holy Spirit: these are always blessings; but in prayer for temporal things it is safer and wiser to ask humbly and with diffidence, laying our desires at God's feet, without anxious pressure, without too much urgency, trustfully submitting all to his unerring wisdom.

The true aim in living is not to grow rich,

to be clothed in earthly honor, to have mere worldly happiness and freedom from suffering and loss, but rather to grow rich in spiritual graces, to be made more and more like Christ and to live out God's purpose and plan for our life. By far the noblest thing for us always is God's will. That means perfect beauty and perfect good. Anything else is marring and blemish.

When shall we pray? When the spirit of prayer is in the heart, there is little need to say just how or when prayer should be offered. Still, there must be habits. Merely to trust to the feeling or desire, and to have no fixed time for devotion, praying only when the heart prompts, is not safe. The end would be a prayerless life. The lamps in the temple burned continually, but they were trimmed and refilled every day. The flame of devotion in a Christian heart should never go out, but this lamp too must be replenished continually.

Certainly, there should be a season of secret prayer at the opening, and again at the close, of every day. "In the morning it seems a hem and border to each day's life, and in the evening it brings down the dew on the spirit, to wash off the stain and dust, and to feed and refresh." In the morning the day lies before us with its unforeseen and untried experiences. It may bring painful

duty, sore struggle, hard task, keen suffering, sharp temptation, or perhaps death. How can we go out into the opening day which may have such experiences for us, without seeking the guidance and help of God? In the evening we bring the day's history for review. There are sins to be forgiven; there is work to be blessed; there are thanks to be spoken for mercies; there is weariness to be refreshed; there is hunger to be fed. Then, as we go into the darkness and defenselessness of the night, there is protection to be invoked, and new life for a new day.

We need to watch always that our prayers are real, fresh from our heart, and that they never degenerate into mere formalities, words without desires, petitions without wishes and without faith. True prayer is talking to God as one talks to a friend; mere words are empty mockeries. We pray best in secret when we tell out our soul's deepest wants in the simplest phrases. As we grow in Christian life prayer becomes more and more real to us.

Dr. Phelps says, "Three stages of growth are commonly discernible respecting prayer in the Christian consciousness. They are, prayer as a resource in emergencies, prayer as a habit at appointed times, and prayer as a state in which a believer lives at all times." In this last and highest development, stated

times of prayer are not abandoned, but the heart does not limit itself to these in communing with God. The spirit of devotion overflows the fixed hours of prayer and holds fellowship with God continuously. Even the busiest hours of work are brightened by many a moment of heavenly communion. This is what is meant by walking with God. Men talk to him while at their work, in ejaculations of prayer.

Thomas à Kempis says, "God alone is a thousand companions; he alone is a world of friends. That man never knew what it was to be familiar with God, who complains of the want of friends while God is with him." It is this state of constant and unbroken communion with God toward which we should all strive.

Let the life of the closet flow out into all the busy hours of the busiest days. It will be a defense for us amid temptations. It will give us power in Christian service. It will hallow all our influence. It will make holy and pure every nook and cranny of our life. It will give us peace in the midst of dangers. It will hold us apart from the world and near to God wherever we go. Like the beloved disciple, our habitual place will then be on the bosom of Jesus, and our earthly spirit will become filled with the brightness and the sweetness of his love.

Thus prayer is indeed the Christian's very vital breath. To cease to pray is to cease to live. The gate of prayer is never shut. We should keep the path to it well trodden. We can there find help in all weakness, light in all darkness, comfort in all sorrow, companionship in all loneliness, friendship in all heart hunger. If we know how to get help in prayer, we need never fail at any point in life; for then all God's might of love is ever back of our weakness, as the great ocean is back of the little bay.

CHAPTER VIII.

Helps: The Bible.

ANOTHER indispensable help in Christian life is the Bible. In prayer, we talk to God; in the Bible, God speaks to us. The first disciples heard the words of divine truth as they dropped directly from the lips of the great Teacher. They could bring their questions right to him, and he would answer them. They could ask him what he wanted them to do, and he would tell them. When they were in sorrow, the words of comfort fell, warm and tender, from the very lips of the Son of God into their sad hearts. One of his friends sat at his feet and listened reverently and lovingly to his instructions; another leaned his head on the Lord's bosom and whispered his confidential questions and received answers; an inquirer came by night to him and had a long talk with him about the way to be saved.

Those were wonderful days when God himself was on this earth in human form, speaking in the tones of actual human speech

the words of life, and answering men's questions with his own lips. We cannot any more hear the divine voice as men heard it then. Yet God still speaks. We can still bring our questions, and he will answer them. We can still sit at the Teacher's feet and hear his words. We can still rest our head on his bosom in our sorrow and listen to his assurances of love. We can still ask him how to be saved, and get a plain, clear answer. God speaks to men in his written word.

The question is how to get help from the Bible. We know the help is there. Others find it, and we see their face glow or the tears glisten in their eyes as they read its pages. But somehow it does not open to us as it does to others. We cannot say, "Oh how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." We try to make ourselves love the Bible and to find its words sweeter than honey and more precious than gold; but, to be perfectly honest, we do not love it, nor do we find in it either the honey or the gold. Yet we know that the sweetness and the richness are there if only we could find them. How may we read the book so that it will open to us and show us its wondrous treasures of light, of love, of comfort, and of help?

For one thing, we must rid ourselves of all superstitious notions about the Bible. It

is not a talisman. Merely having a Bible in one's possession or on one's person will neither drive away evil nor bring good. Soldiers entering battle sometimes throw away their cards and put their Bible into their pocket: they imagine that then they will be safer in danger; but a Bible in a soldier's pocket is in itself no more protection than a pack of cards. Nor, if he has it in his pocket only, will it be of any more use to him if he is killed in battle. The mere owning of a Bible or having one in the house does no one any good. It would be just as well to wear a crucifix or to nail a horseshoe over the door. We must get clear of superstitious impressions respecting the holy word.

We must remember, also, that the mere reading of a certain portion of the Bible every day will not make us wise unto salvation, nor purify our heart, nor give us comfort in sorrow, nor put a staff into our hand to help us along life's rough, steep paths. The Bible does not yield its blessing to such reading.

Then, further, it is not enough to understand the words, or even to memorize them. There are many people who have many Bible texts at their tongue's end who never get any real help from them, nor make any practical use of them. There are those who know the promises and can quote them to

others, who are not able to apply one suitable promise to their own personal needs, and who get no benefit for their own lives from the texts they remember. Hiding the Bible in the memory is not all that is necessary to make its treasures of help availing.

Just what is the office of the Bible with reference to our personal life? There are books which it is necessary merely to read: they have no office or errand to us beyond the pleasure or instruction which their pages may impart as we go over them. We listen to a lecture on astronomy, and we hear many interesting things about the sun, the planets, or the stars. We believe what we hear, and we may remember the facts; but it is not expected that the knowledge of these scientific facts will make any change in our conduct or character to-morrow. If we are in trouble, these truths will not comfort us. We cannot pillow our heads upon them in sorrow. If we are perplexed about duty, we shall not get any light from them,—the stars are too far away and too cold. The same is true of all similar knowledge; our whole duty with regard to it is to receive it and to lay it up among our mental treasures.

But there is more than this to be done with the truths of the Bible. They are the words of God, and as such they are meant to be obeyed. They reveal to us invisible things

—things which no natural human eye can ever see—and we are to believe in these unseen things as eternal realities and to live with reference to them. Every truth in the Bible has a practical bearing upon life in some of its phases. The Bible is therefore a book for life, not merely for knowledge.

An illustration or two will make this plain. The first word that comes to the inquirer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is not enough to know—even to understand—this word. It calls for an act—the committing of the soul, utterly and forever, for salvation, for life, for glory, into the hands of the only Redeemer and Saviour.—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is easy to memorize these words, but that is not all we are expected to do with them. They have their proper outcome only when they draw out our heart's holiest affections and fasten them upon God in loyal, consecrating devotion.—"This is my commandment, That ye love one another." The sentiment, men say, is admirable. It is extolled by many on whose heart and life it makes no impression whatever. No doubt the "sentiment" is very beautiful, but its true office is intensely practical—to kindle in every Christian heart a deep, generous, unselfish affection which

shall bind and hold together all believers in a common and holy brotherhood.

To make proper use of such words as these we must not only understand them and admire them as ethical teachings, but must also submit our life to them, to be influenced, moulded, colored, and directed, by their requirements—that is, we are to receive them as God's words of command to us and obey them accordingly. We are using the precepts and counsels of the Scriptures aright only when we are implicitly, unquestioningly, and loyally, walking in the way they mark out for our feet.

The true outcome of the Bible as a book of commands is a holy personal life and a Christlike personal character. The way, then, to get help from the book is to come to it as to Christ himself, asking what he would have us to do, and then, as we read, submitting our life to every word's impact and influence. Thus the Bible will become to us a personal guide—the voice of Christ, ever saying, "This is the way;" the hand of Christ, ever leading us in right paths.

There is another class of Bible words—the promises. These do not so much call for active obedience as for implicit belief and restful trust. They contain assurances of divine help and blessing in certain circumstances. They tell us of things which we

cannot see. Thus they call for the exercise of faith, and therefore it is not easy to make them available. Many who are faithful in performing every required duty fail to get such help from God's promises in the hours of darkness as these promises are intended to give.

How can Bible promises be made available in times of need? How can we get from them that help which they are intended to give us in living? We must recognize and accept them as the sure and faithful words of God—words that will be fulfilled to the letter in the experience of every child of God who rests upon them. They must be hidden in the heart and kept always ready for instant use. Then, when the need comes for which these promises make provision, they must be personally appropriated and trusted in as God's fresh and explicit words of assurance to his loved ones.

It is, in fact, only in the experiences of real need that the value of the divine promises can be realized. One may greatly admire a lifeboat as he looks at it hanging in its place above the ship's deck on a fair morning, but its true worth he does not know until the ship is going down and the lifeboat is his only hope of rescue. It is so with Bible promises. We do not know their worth until we enter upon the experiences in which we are help-

less without them. We may admire them when all is fair and calm about us, but it is only when the shock of the tempest is on us and our earthly trusts are shattered that we can realize the value of the trusts which have God's arm underneath them. It is only when our path leads down into some dark gorge of trial where no earthly sunbeams fall that we learn the worth of the lamps of heavenly promise.

Thus the Bible is a book for life, and only when we submit our life to it can we get its help. The hungry heart will always find the bread. The sincere and simple-hearted seeker after truth will always find the truth. The submissive spirit will receive guidance. The believing soul will find the arm of the Eternal under every word of promise.

As to the manner of reading the Bible, but few suggestions may here be given. The heart is the great matter: if the heart be right, God's Spirit will guide, and will not only open the treasures of the Scriptures and reveal their sweetness, but will also open the reader's eyes to behold the wondrous things that the sacred book contains.

The Bible should certainly be read every day; our soul as well as our body needs daily bread. It should be read, too, in connection with secret prayer: the two exercises mutually help each other. Devotion without

the word to feed upon is inadequate for our soul's needs, and without prayer the Bible does not open to us nor yield the blessing we seek. We should always keep the Bible lying open on the closet table.

With regard to the method, the Bible may be read in course, or read by books, or read by topics, or read to meet the needs of the day, or read fragmentarily without order or plan. Some persons read the Bible through every year. Too many read without system or method of any kind, beginning wherever the book opens; and as a result they read certain portions many times over, but leave whole sections unread and unexplored. Every intelligent Christian should seek to become familiar with all parts of the Bible, and therefore it is well to read it through regularly in order.

Besides this, however, it is well to read also by topics, searching the volume through with concordance and text book, to know what the Holy Spirit teaches on all phases of a particular subject. It is profitable, too, to read single books, if possible at one sitting. This is especially helpful to the understanding of the Epistles. As experience ripens and the book becomes more familiar, it is pleasant and helpful to turn each day to passages that meet the peculiar needs of the day. Young Christians will usually find it

profitable to begin with the story of Christ in the Gospels, studying the life and words of the Master until their hearts are filled with thoughts and memories of him whose life is their pattern and whose words are to guide their steps.

The system of international Sabbath-school lessons affords an excellent opportunity for thorough and consecutive Bible study. In seven years the student is carried through the whole book. Of course many parts of it are not taken up in the lessons; but if the portions thus omitted between the Sabbath sections are carefully read each week, the entire Bible will be gone over in the seven years. The daily "home readings" indicated in connection with the lessons form in themselves an excellent Bible-reading course covering every day in the year. For most young people there is perhaps no better system of Scripture study than that which follows the order of the Sabbath-school course—the lessons, the home readings, the connecting portions, and the references. If this is closely and conscientiously followed, day after day and year after year, it will in the end yield a full, intelligent and systematic knowledge of the word that makes wise unto salvation.

But, in whatever order the Bible may be read, let it surely be read. There are now so

many commentaries and other writings upon the Scriptures that we are in danger of reading a great deal *about* the Bible, while the book itself is neglected. It is important that we search the Scriptures themselves. Then each one should search for himself. It is not enough to take the golden findings that another has dug out: we must dig for ourselves.

Above all, we must pray for light while we read, that we may discover the precious things which God has stored away in his word; and we must pray for submission, that we may be able to yield our life to every influence of the truth; and we must pray for faith, that we may be able to realize the invisible things of God which the holy word reveals, and get their support and their blessing for our soul.

CHAPTER IX.

Helps: the Church and its Services.

BESIDES the help received in private devotion, every young Christian needs the aid which the public services of the church are designed to afford. We were not made to live alone. We lean upon and cling to each other "like trailing flowers that grow by interlacing." The necessities of our being require companionship. Mind grows and develops best in contact with other minds. One log will not burn alone. In a sense God himself is all we need, and in communion with him every want of our soul is met:

"Yea, through life, through death, through sorrow and through sinning,
He shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed."

Yet the glory is so great, the splendor is so dazzling, that we need human hands to bring the divine blessing down to us. Besides, the heart does not rise to its highest fervor in the solitude of the closet. Our warmest feelings of devotion are drawn out when we unite

with others in associated service. The consciousness that a whole congregation of worshipers about us is moved by the same emotion that we experience, whether it be gratitude, confession of sin, or prayer for mercy, deepens the emotion in us.

Then there are special promises to those who unite in the services of God's worship. In times of great defection particular mention was made by the prophet of those "who feared the Lord and spake often one to another." It was said that "the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him." Jesus gave a special promise of answer to prayer when his people shall agree in asking, implying that, as added strands make the cable stronger, so added hearts make the supplication more availing. He also gave a definite promise of his own presence where even two or three of his disciples shall meet together in his name.

There is no doubt that there are blessings which we can obtain in the public worship, where many hearts mingle their homage and their prayers, which we cannot find in secret. Private devotion is indispensable and cannot be replaced by the public services; yet, in addition to all the aid we can get in our religious life in secret prayer and Bible reading, we need, and cannot afford to neglect,

public worship. To do so is to deprive ourselves of one of the greatest helps in Christian life.

We can better understand the nature of the help we may receive from the church services if we have definite conceptions of the objects of public worship.

One object is to honor God by bringing to him our heart's homage. This element of worship is one that needs to be strongly emphasized. Many persons have the impression that the sermon is the most important—even the all-important—feature of the service. Too little is made of the devotional part. The error is a grave one. In the divine intention the primary object in public religious service is to worship God, to bring to him our heart's love and adoration, our gratitude and our confession, and to renew before him our personal consecration.

Another object in the public service is instruction. The minister has been trained to be an expounder of the word of God. He has spent years in preparation for his work. He devotes the golden hours of every day to special study and thought, so as to be able each Sabbath to bring to his people and clearly and impressively put before them some important truth of Holy Scriptures. The people come to the church to be instructed in things concerning God's character

and will and concerning their own needs and duties.

A third object in the public service is spiritual growth and culture. We learn about God's character, that we may adore and worship him more fervently; about his will, that we may obey him more implicitly; about his promises, that we may trust him more confidently; about our duty, that we may do it more faithfully. The object of worship, also, so far as its influence upon ourselves is concerned, is the spiritual blessing and strength that come from communion with God and the opening of the heart in the warmth of his presence.

These public services are designed, therefore, and adapted to impart help to the sincere worshiper. No one can spend an hour in God's presence, looking up into his face and occupied with thoughts of him to the exclusion of worldly thoughts, and not experience a cleansing of heart and a kindling of soul which will prove a great enriching of the life. All that is good in us receives quickening and new impulse in such an atmosphere; all that is evil is checked and repressed.

The influence of fellowship in worship with other Christians is also of great profit. We are lifted up on the tide of spiritual emotion. Our affections are purified. The

bonds of Christian love are strengthened. There is the benefit, also, derived from the instruction in God's word which we receive. Now we are warned against some danger; now some sin in us is rebuked; now it is a word of comfort which comes to cheer us in sorrow; now it is a new thought about God, the unveiling to us of an attribute in his character, which draws out in us fresh adoration and love; now it is a call to some neglected duty.

Besides all these benefits, there is the renewal of spiritual strength which we find in the house of God: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Life wastes our vigor. Its duties and struggles exhaust us. The Sabbath services bring us again into communion with God, and the emptied pitchers are refilled. No one can spend an hour in God's house in true and sincere worship and not be better and stronger for it for many days.

How to get from the church services the help they have to give to us is one of the most important practical questions in Christian life.

It is quite possible to attend these services, even with commendable regularity, and yet receive but little spiritual profit. There is no holy atmosphere in the house of God that is necessarily medicinal or tonic to our soul.

There is no filtration of grace into our life that goes on without agency of our own while we sit with shut heart in our soft pew in the sanctuary and dream through a service. Forms of worship, whether plain or elaborate, are empty without the sincere homage and faith of a loving heart. They carry up to God just what we put into them; they bring to us from God just what with prayer and faith we draw out of them.

Two persons may sit side by side and take part outwardly in the exercises of devotion, yet from one there will rise to God pure incense and an acceptable offering, and from the other the empty mockery of a heartless and formal service; the one worshiper goes away strengthened and blessed, and the other carries away nothing but an empty hand and a cold, unblest heart. Whatever the forms of public service may be, the heart must be truly engaged or the worship will be vain and unprofitable.

To make this chapter as helpful as possible to young Christians, a few definite practical suggestions are offered.

To begin with, thoughtful preparation for church services will greatly increase their profitableness to those who engage in them. The very best ordinary preparation is a season of private devotion before going to the house of God. The heart is thus cleansed

of its worldly thoughts, is opened and warmed toward God, and is in a suitable condition to enter earnestly and reverently into the acts of public worship.

A reverent approach toward and entrance into God's house are further aids to blessing in the services. We should at least remember that we are going to meet God, and should know and consider well on what errand we are going—to worship him and receive help for our own life, if we have any real errand at all—and should have our expectations aroused in anticipation of communion with God and his people, and our heart eager with desire for the holy meeting.

Many persons enter God's house with as little thoughtfulness and seriousness as if it were a concert or a literary entertainment they had come to hear. Such persons are not prepared either to render acceptable worship or to receive needed help in the service. We shall find in God's house and in his ordinances just what we are spiritually prepared to find. God must be in the heart, or we shall not see God in the exercises of worship. We shall never find in the sanctuary that which we do not seek and want to find. If we enter careless and indifferent, with no spirit of devotion, we shall carry away no blessing. If we come with longing and earnest desire to meet God and lay our

burdens at his feet, to rest and refresh ourselves in his presence, and to receive new strength from him for duty, we shall find all we wish.

Another condition of help is earnest personal interest in each part of the service. There is no blessing in our being merely among true worshipers and in the presence of God. A throng was close about Jesus one day, but one only of them all was healed; she was healed because she reached out her trembling finger and in faith touched the hem of Christ's garment. The multitude thronged, but only one touched him. This history may be repeated any Sabbath in any congregation. While many crowd close about Christ, only those will receive blessing who touch the hem of his robe.

Even in public services we do not worship in companies, but as individuals. One sitting close beside us may hold delightful communion with God and receive rich spiritual refreshment, while our heart remains like a dry, parched field; in the midst of the showers, yet receiving not one drop of rain from the full, overhanging clouds. No matter what others may or may not do or receive, our business in God's house is personal. There is blessing there for us if we will take it. Suppose the minister *is* a little dull and the service a little wearisome; yet is not God

present? The blessing is not in the minister nor in the service, but in God himself, who is ready always to dispense to the tired and the hungry the rest and the bread they crave.

Then, after the service, we should go away thoughtfully and reverently as we came. The custom which prevails in some churches of lingering a moment in silent prayer after the benediction is very beautiful and impressive. Let the last minute be spent looking into God's face for a parting benediction.

Church-aisle sociability, so often commended, no doubt has its pleasant side, but it certainly has its disadvantages and its grave dangers. We may without spiritual harm greet one another cordially and affectionately in quiet tones as we pass out, but too often the conversation runs either into criticism of the preacher and the sermon, or off on trivial and worldly themes. The consequence is, that the good seed sown is picked up and devoured by the birds before it has had time to root. We would better go away, quietly pondering the great thoughts which the service has suggested to us, seeking to deepen in our heart the impressions made and to assimilate in our life the truths of God's word which have fallen upon our ears.

From the church gate back again to the closet whence we set out is the best walk to

take after the service has closed. A few moments of secret prayer will carry the blessings of the sanctuary so deep into our hearts that thereafter they will be part of our very life.

A special word may fitly be spoken of the Lord's Supper and of the way in which we can get help from it. In the minds of many people a great deal of unnecessary mystery hangs about this ordinance. That which sets it apart from other services is that it is a memorial feast appointed by Christ himself, in which our thought and faith are helped by visible elements that represent to us the great spiritual facts of our redemption.

The help this service gives is not different from that received from other ordinances, unless it be that the use of the visible symbols brings Christ and his sacrificial work more vividly before our dull eyes than where words only are used to picture the same truths. In this sense it is a greater aid to faith than a sermon or a hymn; but, as in all worship, so in the communion, the blessing comes, not from the ordinance itself, but from Christ.

How, then, can we get from the Lord's Supper the help it has to give? Only by finding the way to Christ and submitting our heart to the tender influences of his love.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial; we

should remember Christ as we come to his table. It is a memorial especially of Christ's sufferings and death: we should recall his humiliation, his obedience, his agony, his crucifixion, and think of the love that led him voluntarily to make himself an offering for sin. But memories alone will not bless us,—there must be appropriating faith. "Broken for *you*," said the Master; "Broken for *me*" should be faith's answer.

There should be in the heart of the sincere Christian no more dread in going to the Lord's Supper than in going to any other service. St. Paul's word "*unworthily*"—which has been misunderstood by so many—has reference entirely to the manner in which persons observe the ordinance, not to the persons themselves.

The Corinthians to whom St. Paul was writing made it a common feast, with reveling—even with drunkenness. Of course, any one who would observe it in such a way, or any one who would sit at the table without really loving Christ, without believing on him, without truly worshiping him and submitting to him, or who would act irreverently or with levity, would be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." But in the apostle's word there is not the slightest allusion to those who feel themselves unworthy, yet who are sincere and true disciples of Christ. A

sense of personal unworthiness is part of all true faith in Christ.

"Not worthy, Lord, to gather up the crumbs
With trembling hand that from thy table fall,
A weary, heavy-laden sinner comes
To plead thy promise and obey thy call."

If the heart be sincere, if the trust in Christ be true though trembling, and the obedience loyal though imperfect, we have the same right to come boldly to the Lord's Table as to prayer or any other ordinance. We can sin in any act of worship by formality, by insincerity, by levity, by want of heart, and we can sin in the same ways in receiving the Lord's Supper. In partaking of this sacred memorial feast we need to be sure only that we are truly in living union with Christ, that we are trusting him alone as our Saviour and following him faithfully as our Lord, and that we come to his table with a sincere desire to meet him and to seek blessing from him.

The young Christian should never stay away from the Lord's Supper when it is celebrated in the church of which he is a member. If he is conscious of sin and failure, let him make humble confession and start anew. The Lord's Supper will help him to do this. We cannot afford to miss this ordinance. The weaker we are, and the more unworthy, the more do we need it.

Besides, it is in a peculiar sense a Christ-confessing ordinance: we take our place at his table, and thus witness to the world that we are his. His honor therefore demands that we should never absent ourselves when his people thus confess him.

There are other church services which have their large possibilities of help for young Christians. Among these are weekly meetings for prayer. From Sabbath to Sabbath is a long stretch when the way is hard, when distractions are many, and when the battles are sore. The prayer meeting is a little oasis, midway. It is a place specially for the refreshment of Christians. Every young disciple should put it down among his positive weekly engagements. We cannot afford to miss it if we are at all earnest in our desire to be strong and noble Christians.

The Sabbath-school is another of the church services which no young Christian should miss. It is not for children only: it ought to be a Bible school for the whole church, with its classes of young men and young women, and of old people with dim eyes and gray heads. It is on God's word that we all need to feed more and more. It will make us strong. It will lead us in right paths. It will beautify our character. It will put into our hand the sword of the Spirit for battle with temptation. It will pre-

pare a pillow for our head in sickness and sorrow. It will at the last guide us through the valley of the shadow of death.

In most churches there is a Christian Endeavor or other young people's society. This is really a training school for young Christians. They have an opportunity of learning to take part in church services. They can begin here in a very humble and easy way and in a sympathetic atmosphere, and by practice can overcome their natural timidity, until at last they can rise and speak with freedom in any meeting. It is well for many young Christians to unite with a young people's society for the sake of the training they will receive, not only in the prayer meetings, but also in the work of the society.

We need the church services. We cannot neglect them and not suffer harm and loss. Whenever the church bell summons us to the house of God, we should gladly respond. We should become church-goers by habit. We should reverently enter the gates of the sanctuary. We should worship God in sincerity and in truth. We should come away thoughtfully and with prayer.

Then in the busy days which follow will come the proofs of the helpfulness and blessing that our lives have found in the services. The food that is eaten to-day is the strength of the laborer, the eloquence of the orator,

the skill of the artisan, to-morrow. The spring sunshine and rain that fall upon the dry, briery rose bush reappear in due time in fragrant, lovely roses. And sincere and true worship in the quiet of the sanctuary will show itself in the beautiful character, the sweetened spirit, the brightened hope, the truer, better living and the holier consecration of the days of toil and struggle that come after.

CHAPTER X.

Some of the Duties.

IT is a high attainment to be a good church member. One must first be a good Christian. Without this, church membership counts for nothing in the life of the person. We must always put first things first. We must join Christ before we join the church. Church membership will not save us.

But when we have taken Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and have consecrated our life to him, the next privilege we enjoy is that of uniting with his church. This involves duties which the young Christian should be ready to perform and responsibilities which he should humbly accept.

One of these is a continuous and consistent confession of Christ. We speak of uniting with the church as confessing Christ. It is a sacred moment when a company of young people stand up in the presence of their friends and make their first public confession of Christ. Then they sit down at the Lord's Table, and receive their first Holy

Communion. They have now confessed Christ before men. Their act is very beautiful. The Master, looking on this band of young Christians in these moments of their solemn commitment of themselves to him, is pleased with their consecration and with their promise to be his and to follow him fully and forever.

This is a confession of Christ, but it is not all of the confession; it is only the beginning of it. Those who have made this public avowal, have thus set themselves apart for God. They are not their own. They have taken a new master. Their confession of Christ henceforth should be continuous. "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples," said Jesus to beginners. Indeed it is the life of the common days among men that tests the reality and sincerity of the first confession. It is easy to stand up in the midst of a company of Christians, all sympathetic and friendly, and say, "I am a Christian;" it is not so easy, however, on the play ground, in the office, in the social gathering, in the place of business, in the presence of those who are unsympathetic and unfriendly, to say, "I am a follower of Christ." Yet this is what is expected and required of those who have declared themselves Christians.

The daily confession need not be made

always in words, but it is to be made in the life. Those who belong to Christ must walk worthy of their Master. Their conduct, wherever they go, must be such as will please him and meet with his approval. They must do nothing and say nothing that will bring dishonor on the name they bear. They represent Christ in the world—"As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you," he said to his first disciples.

A young girl when received into the church was asked what it would be for her to be a Christian. She replied, "I suppose it will be to do what Jesus would do and behave as Jesus would behave, if he were a little girl and lived at our house." No better answer could have been given. One of our duties as church members is to do what Jesus would do and to behave as he would behave if he were precisely in our place and our circumstances. We carry in our life not only the honor of the church but the honor of Christ, and we should never fail.

There are important and specific duties which every member owes to his church. Some of these have already been indicated in another chapter of this book. One word, faithfulness, will cover them all. We often speak of persons belonging to the church. The phrase is very suggestive. If we belong to the church, we owe it our best love, our

best life, our best service, our best influence and help.

Nothing but the will of God should keep us away from the meetings of the church. Then, being present at the services is not enough. We should earnestly and heartily participate in these services. Very chilling is the influence of those worshipers who sit in indifferent silence while joyous hymns are being sung, who keep their eyes wide open and are busy gazing over the house during the prayers, who pay no heed to Scripture lesson or sermon, and who take no interest whatever in any of the parts of worship. The ideal church member will be earnest and fervent in his devotions and deeply interested in all the services. Enthusiasm is contagious, and the influence of one warm-hearted worshiper upon others in a congregation is very great.

The social life of a church is important. There are churches which have the reputation of being cold, unsocial, unsympathetic. Strangers come and go, but find no warmth, no human interest, no kindly welcome. No one offers them a friendly hand. Then there are churches which are known as sociable, where strangers receive hearty greeting and are made to feel at home. The atmosphere of the meetings is full of cordiality and hospitality.

One of the duties of church membership, therefore, is to exercise the spirit of love toward all fellow members and toward all who enter the church. Jesus said that all men should know his disciples by their love one for another. This was wonderfully true of the first Christians, after the day of Pentecost. They had all things in common. The rich shared with the poor. The strong helped the weak. The world had never seen such love before—there had never before been such love. "Behold how these Christians love one another!" heathen men said in their wonder.

So should it be in every Christian church. The members should live together as one family. When one is glad all should rejoice. When one is in sorrow all should be touched with the feeling of grief. They should bear one another's burdens. Such a church is a true home for souls. The weary, the tempted, the baffled, the defeated, the sorrowing, the friendless, turn to it with hunger and yearning, as they would turn to Christ himself if he were here.

Every member should do his part to make his church such a Christly refuge. One brusque, unsocial person may greatly hinder the prevalence of the spirit of love and hospitality in a church. It takes the hearty help of every one to make a church at all

points and to all who come within its doors, a place of cordial, hospitable love.

It is not necessary to go into further detail as to the particular duties of church members. They owe their church generous support, and every young Christian should begin at once to do his part in giving. The church boards are organized for the purpose of receiving money for the specific objects which they represent and then of carrying on the branch of work that belongs to them. Every church member's privilege is to help these various approved causes as he may be able to do, as God prospers him.

Every well-organized church has its departments, with its societies, bands and guilds, its Sabbath school, its young people's meetings, its work among the poor. No one need lack the opportunity to do something—there is a place for every grade of ministry and every kind of service. Even the youngest member can find something to do and a chance to be trained for larger work in years of more strength and experience.

It is not easy to be a good church member —it is not easy to be useful and helpful anywhere. It requires the denial, the obliteration, of self. If we are in the church to be served, to receive attention, to be helped, to get promotion, to seek office, to reap benefit in any way for ourselves, we shall fail of the

blessing and good we might receive. The true spirit seeks, like the Master, not to be ministered unto but to minister.

This means that we must be ready always to give up our own convenience in order to do a kindness to another, to deny ourselves in any matter, that we may relieve or assist one who needs our help. It means that we must have patience with the weak and the stumbling, and be ready always to help a "fainting robin back unto his nest again." It costs to be such a church member, but no price is too great to pay for the privilege of filling well such an honored place in the kingdom of our Master.

We need not fear about reward. Such love always yields its own reward. The reward for good serving is more serving, more unselfish serving. We need not hope for ease as reward for sacrifice, nor for a time of self-indulgence after our time of self-denial. But the opportunity to do more and greater good is always the best compensation for any good we may have done.

True, there is heaven at the end—but neither will heaven be a place of ease and rest; it too will be a place of service. "God will give each of us a star for a workshop by and by," but still the life will be all love, and love always serves.

CHAPTER XI.

Growing in One's Place: Providence.

MANY people imagine that they could live very much better if their circumstances were different. In their failure to live a noble and worthy life they find comfort in laying the blame on some infelicity or hardness in their lot.

This is very foolish. For one thing, it does no good. Blaming circumstances will not change them. After all, they are *our* circumstances, and we must live out our life in the midst of them. Besides, God in his providence has put us just where we find ourselves, and unless we claim to be wiser than God, we must conclude that we are in the right place—at least, that it is quite possible for us to live a true Christian life where we are.

"Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident:
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And shouldst thou there small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent,
Nor let the time thou owest to God be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightest be."

God does not choose for us the place where we can have the most pleasant time, with the least friction and the fewest weights and encumbrances. Life on the earth is a school, and he puts us where we shall receive the best training. The easier place might be more comfortable, but the harder place does the more for us—makes the more out of us.

Some people think that if they could get away from others and live alone they would be better Christians. Men irritate them, tempt them, stir up the evil that is in them, excite them. But men do not grow best in solitude and apart from others. The goodness that is good only because there is no friction, no provocation, nothing to try it, is scarcely worth the name. Life needs life to school it and develop it.

The old monks were wrong in their idea of Christian living when they supposed that they could reach a higher state of holiness by withdrawing from men and dwelling alone. God's plan is to set the solitary in families rather than to separate families into solitariness. We all need to be sometimes alone. There should be hours when we enter into our closet and shut the door, that we may look in upon our own heart and hold communion with God; but the closet is not to be our abiding place.

"Hark, hark! a voice amid the quiet intense!
It is thy duty waiting thee without.
Rise from thy knees in hope, the half of doubt;
A hand doth pull thee: it is Providence:
Open thy door straightway and get thee hence;
Go forth into the tumult and the shout;
Work, love, with workers, lovers, all about.
Of noise alone is born the inward sense
Of silence, and from action springs alone
The inward knowledge of true love and faith."

We owe duties to others. To live only for one's self, though the aspiration be purely for holiness, is contrary to the spirit of true discipleship. Our duties to others are as manifold and as diversified as the varying phases and conditions of life's reciprocal relations. We are debtors to all men, far and near. God wants us on the earth to fulfill these duties. We are to serve him not by pure devotion apart from men, but in relations. Those who leave society and flee to the cloister simply run away from their chief mission. We are not left in this world after conversion merely to pray and praise; God wants us to be useful, to do his work, to run his errands, to help his needy, suffering ones, to train children for his service, to fight his battles.

"What are we set on earth for? Say to toil,
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day till it declines,
And death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with his odorous oil
To wrestle, not to reign. . . .

So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.
The least flower with a brimming cup may stand
And share its dewdrop with another near."

Nor is it alone for the sake of others that God has appointed us to live out our life among men rather than apart and alone; it is for our own sake as well. We grow best amid other lives. People are means of grace to us. It may seem to us that if we could get away from society we should escape many temptations and be able to live nearer to God. But we would then miss the blessing which comes from struggle and victory. Heaven and its honors are for "him that overcometh." Not to enter the struggle is to fail of the white robe and palm of the victor. The best things in life are not found along flowery walks, but in the fields of conflict. There are qualities in us that can be developed only in struggle. To find easy places away from the strife of battle is to lose the discipline that makes grand character.

We grow best under the pressure of duty, where we are compelled to think of others and serve them. There are those who imagine that if they could get away from men and from absorbing contacts with other lives they could live better. They could then

enjoy unbroken communion with God. But this is not the divine ordinance for a human life. Love to God does not stand alone as life's single duty; love to man is always joined with it, and the two duties are so intertwined that neither can be performed without the other. We cannot love God and not love our fellowmen; we cannot serve God and not serve our brother.

Sometimes we imagine that if we could get away from business cares, household burdens, and social obligations, we could be better Christians. It seems to us that these duties are not favorable to spiritual culture, and that we could be holier and could live more as Christ lived if we were freed from their exacting and absorbing claims. But this is a mistake. It is in the doing of these common duties that our powers are best developed. God puts the new life into our heart, but we must work it out into strength and beauty, and there is no way to do this but by exercise. If we would develop the love of our heart, we must love people; the sentiment must take practical form; the seed germ must be cultivated; and for this no mere cloister culture will do. If we would learn patience, there is no school but in experiences that require us to exercise patience.

Jesus said that rank among his disciples is won by serving, that he who serves most is

chief: we can gain this spiritual eminence only by filling our place in the midst of human needs and sufferings, where continually the pressure is upon us, calling for service. The serving must be real serving of actual living people; no fine sentiment alone will exalt us. Good feelings and dispositions, of whatever kind, can become part of the fiber of life only when they are wrought out in experience. Spiritual graces cannot be cultivated in the abstract. Character is more than sentiment: it is sentiment incarnated, grown into life and reality.

Instead therefore of being hindrances to the development of our Christian life and character, our relative duties are in the largest measure helpful. To tear ourselves out of our place among men in order to get rid of these duties would be to leave whole fields of our nature uncultivated and many of the richest possibilities of our regenerated life undeveloped. The common duties that the daily round brings to our hand, although they may seem to be far from spiritual in their influence, and may seem to draw us off from communion with God by keeping us absorbed in and occupied with earthly tasks, are to us really not hindrances, but rich means of grace. We grow best Godward when we are serving best manward, in Christ's name and for his sake.

Therefore, in the cultivation of the Christian life, we can do nothing better than attend with fidelity and diligence to the duties that belong to us in our varied relations. The head of a family should take up promptly, as the first biddings of his new Master, his duties as a husband and father, performing them with new faithfulness and tenderness and with the new motive in his heart of love to Christ. On becoming a Christian a child in the home should accept as the "Father's business" for him at present his duties of obedience and honor to his earthly father and mother. The will of God for brothers and sisters beginning to follow Christ is to render to each other all the sweet and helpful service of patient, unselfish love that belongs to their sacred relationship.

We are called to walk with God, but not ordinarily by withdrawing from among men. We are to walk with God in the place to which he has assigned us. We are called to be holy, but holiness is not some vague, nebulous thing, some abstract condition of soul attained apart from common practical life. Holiness is obedience to duty, and no one can be holy and neglect the service to his fellow men which his relationships impose upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

Preparation for Trial.

TRIAL lies somewhere in every one's path. To the young it may seem far off, and even thinking of it may be unwelcome. "Why should we stain the blue of our skies," they ask, "with anticipations of trouble that may not come for years?" We are specially commanded by our Lord himself not to take anxious thought for any to-morrow. The true rule of a life of trust is to live by the day.

"Make a little fence of trust
Around to-day;
Fill the space with loving works,
And therein stay;
Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon to-morrow:
God will help thee bear what comes,
If joy or sorrow."

Yet there is a sense in which even in their happiest days the young should anticipate trial. The man whose garners have been filled from this year's golden harvest should not be anxious about next year's bread, but

he must forecast his future wants by sowing in time to have another harvest. We need not sadden our days of joy by anticipations of coming sorrow, but we ought, even in our sunniest hours, to be preparing for the times of gloom, so as to be in readiness for them when they come. We ought in our plenty years to store away provision to feed upon in the famine years that will follow. We ought in the glad springtime, amid plenty, to sow the seeds whose fruit we shall need in the dreary autumn. In the pleasant summer days, when we have no need for fuel, we ought to gather the wood which by and by we shall want for our winter fires.

The attendants went through the train at midday and lighted the lamps in the cars. It seemed a strange and altogether useless thing to do, and many facetious remarks regarding it were made by the passengers. But soon the train rushed into a long, dark tunnel, and then the lighting of the lamps appeared no longer either a strange or a useless thing; nor was their light despised. It may seem idle and unnecessary now to the young and joyous to hang up lamps of comfort in their hearts, while the sun of earthly blessing shines brightly upon them and while their path lies amid the flowers and through smiling valleys; but there are dark places farther on, unseen as yet—unsuspected

even—into which they may plunge suddenly without time or opportunity to find the lamps of comfort and light them, and in which they will be left in utter darkness if they have made no provision in advance. But if, while they moved along in the brightness, they have wisely prepared for the dark passage, then the lamps will pour their grateful light about them and cheer the gloom.

There is a wide difference between being anxious about coming troubles and being prepared beforehand for troubles that may come. The former is a sin; the latter is a duty. Those only can truly live in quiet peace, without anxiety, who have already made preparation for anything that may come to them. No one can find real pleasure on the sea in the calmest weather who is not confident that the ship on which he is carried has been built and rigged for the fiercest tempest that may arise. No one can enjoy life in the fullest measure who is not prepared for sudden death. And no one can get the best out of joy and gladness who has not made provision for sorrow.

What preparation can we make in advance for trial? For one thing, there are certain great foundation truths which, if firmly laid in our minds, will prove abiding sources of comfort in any trial that may come. One is the Christian doctrine of providence. There

is no chance in this universe; there are no accidents. God's government extends to "all his creatures and all their actions."

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls
Whate'er thou fearest;
Round him in calmest music rolls
Whate'er thou hearest.
What to thee is shadow to him is day,
And the end he knoweth,
And not on a blind and aimless way
The spirit goeth."

So personal and minute is God's care that amid all the vast and complicated affairs of the universe not one of us is overlooked or forgotten, nor are the smallest interests of the least and humblest of us allowed to suffer.

The firm fixing in our minds of this great truth prepares us to receive without doubt or alarm whatever God may send, and sweetly and trustfully to submit to his will.

Preparation may also be made in times of joy and gladness for the days of trial, by filling our hearts with the truths of the Scriptures. The wise virgins were not left in darkness when their lamps had burned out, because they had a reserve of oil in their vessels. If we have a store of divine promises and consolations hidden in our heart during the sunny days, we shall never be left in darkness, however suddenly the shadow

may fall upon us. Words of Scripture in which we have never before seen any special comfort will then shine out with bright luster, like stars when the sun has gone down, pouring heavenly light into our souls. God will then speak to us in his own words, and we shall hear his voice of love and be cheered and strengthened by the assurances he gives. We shall find among the treasured comforts the very help we need—a staff to support us in the rough path, a lamp to lighten the bit of dark road, an arm to lean upon if we are weak and faint, a hand to guide if we do not know where to go, a word of hope if we are cast down, a bosom to rest upon if we are weary and crushed, a balm of healing if our hearts are wounded or broken.

There is consolation in the Bible for every possible experience of sorrow; and if we but have the divine words laid up in our heart, we shall find them as we need them, and they will sweeten our Marahs for us. They will come to our aid at the right moment, and will prove God's very angels to us with their light and their help.

> "When the sun withdraws his light,
> Lo! the stars of God are there;
> Present hosts unseen till night—
> Matchless, countless, silent, fair."

The same is true of preparation for meet-

ing temptation. This is best made by storing the heart with the commands and promises of God's word, which may be brought out in the hour of need and made available for defense. When our Lord was tempted, he made use of the words of divine truth in resisting the tempter. If we would meet and overcome temptations, we must follow the example of our Master. But to do this we must have the Scripture words hidden in our heart, ready for use at any moment of need or danger. Our Lord did not open his parchment roll at that moment, find, and then read, the divine sentences which drove the tempter away. He had pondered the holy book in the quiet days before the enemy tried him, and had its words stored in his heart, ready for instant use when the hour of need came.

In Holman Hunt's great picture "The Shadow of Death," which represents Jesus as a young man in the carpenter's shop stretching himself at the close of a weary day, and with his outspread arms making the shadow of a cross on the wall, there is a minor feature that is full of suggestion. On a shelf is a collection of books in the form of rolls, such as were in use in those days. They represent the library Jesus used—the books of the Holy Scriptures. They are there in the shop where he worked, suggesting that in his leisure

moments he turned to them to ponder their great truths and store away their principles in his memory and in his heart. No doubt the picture truly represents the daily habit of his life in those quiet years when he was preparing for his great public work. Thus it was that when the tempter came there was no need for feverish haste in preparing for defense. The weapons were ready, and the victory was easy.

From this example of Jesus we should learn to prepare in advance for temptation by filling our hearts in the days of youth and early life with the truths of God's word. The soldier cannot learn the art of war when the battle is upon him; if he is not already trained he can only suffer defeat. When the tempter has come, there will be no time to search out texts with which to ward off his blows; but if we have the sacred words treasured in our heart, it will be easy to draw them forth, as arrows from a quiver, for use at any moment of danger.

Another preparation for trial is a close walk with God. Nothing adds more to the bitterness of any grief than the memory of a careless or a sinful life; while nothing alleviates the pain of affliction so much as the remembrance of faithfulness in duty and the consciousness of divine approval. If our habitual daily life has been near to God, we

have no trouble in finding God when in some sore stress we greatly need him; but if we have been living far from God in the bright days, neglecting our devotions and our duties, it takes a long time, when trial comes, to get into such close fellowship with God that we can receive the tender personal comforts which he imparts to those who in intimate friendship lean upon his breast.

Our habitual treatment of our friends in the season of unbroken fellowship has very much to do with the comfort we shall get when we are called to mourn the loss of these friends. If we have been unkind, selfish, thoughtless, or harsh; if we have failed in any duty to them; if we have caused them pain or trouble; if we have wronged or injured them in any way,—no fullness and richness of divine comfort will altogether take away the pang from our heart when we stand by the cold clay and it is too late to ask or to receive forgiveness. But if we have been faithful and true to our friends in all ways; if we have been thoughtful and kind; if we have let our love flow out in fond expression and unselfish ministry,—when they leave us our sorrow at the loss may be no less sore, but it will have no bitterness in it. Loyal and tender friendship is a preparation for sorrow; its memory is a sweetener of bereavement.

To all of us sorrow will come in some form or other. But we may so lay up in store the resources of comfort that in whatever way it may come, in whatever measure or however suddenly, we shall not be crushed by it, but shall welcome it as God's angel and receive the message our Father sends to us in it and the benediction it brings to us from heaven.

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee.
Do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow,
And ere his shadow cross thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave."

In God's plan for each life one step is always designed to prepare for the next. One day's faithfulness lifts up to the next day's duty and fits for the next day's trial. Faithfulness—simple faithfulness—each hour, each moment, is all that is necessary to prepare for any future. Then, at the end, such a life will stand approved and complete, ready for the crowning, at the feet of Him who is Redeemer, Lord, Pattern, Helper, and Friend.

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